

PROJECT WELL TARGETS WOMEN IN INDIAN VILLAGES TO EDUCATE THEM THE IMPORTANCE OF USING CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND ALSO ON PRACTICE OF PROPER SANITATION AND HYGIENE

In the villages of West Bengal, India, as in many other developing countries, women are responsible for rearing their children and feeding their families. **Water** is an important issue in this part of the country because it is **contaminated with high levels of arsenic**. Studies show that 1 in 100 people dies when arsenic is at 50 parts per billion, and almost 75% of the tubewells in the arsenic afflicted villages of West Bengal contain arsenic above that level. **Project Well installs arsenic-safe modern bore-dugwells** in these villages, and teaches users (especially women) to maintain the wells, as well as the importance of drinking uncontaminated water.



According to UNICEF report in India only 13 per cent of adult males collect water. That means 87 per cent of women not only collect water for their family but they also do most of the work in the kitchen.

- Hence it is important for women working in the kitchen to know that if water tainted with arsenic is used to make tea or cook rice, the arsenic content gets concentrated.
- Often, tubewells that are close to home are contaminated, so the woman of the household must make an effort to fetch water that is safe for drinking and for cooking.
- Studies show that children are especially affected if they drink arsenic-contaminated water while they are growing.
- Special information is provided to women who are pregnant or newlyweds about drinking arsenic-safe water, because studies have shown that pregnant mothers are at risk of spontaneous abortions and children exposed in the womb are at higher risk of many diseases as they grow up and well into adulthood.



In the field, both women and men are trained to maintain the *modern bore-dugwells*, including the application of a chlorine-based disinfectant. At the health meetings held after the wells are constructed, women generally attend in higher numbers. There they are educated on sanitation and personal hygiene. About 40 percent of infants in this part of the world get diarrhea due to their mothers' unclean hands and nails. The mothers at the meetings are taught to wash their hands before serving food and to keep water-storing containers free from human contact, since point-of-use is the main source of bacterial contamination.



Thus, the focus of Project Well is not only on providing arsenic-safe water to villagers in India, but also to educate primarily women and children through village meetings, in small and large groups, and through visits to individual families whenever necessary.

Next on the Project Well agenda is a specially-developed video focusing on women and children, teaching the benefits of arsenic-safe bore-dugwell water, proper sanitation and hygiene. Project Well will show this video at village meetings and meetings held at education, religious and governmental institutions, as a supplement to its other awareness programs.

This rigorous teaching of the communities through the audio-visual programs will be documented in the already established surveillance program that is used to monitor the usage and quality of the water of more than 100 Project Well formulated modern bore-dugwells.

